

*The Nativity of CHRIST considered
improved.*

IN
TWO SERMONS

Preached at the

MERCHANTS LECTURE

AT

SALTERS-HALL;

And at the

Protestant Dissenters Chapel

IN

LONG-DITCH,

WESTMINSTER. K

By OB^h. HUGHES, D. D.

Published at the Request of several Friends.

L O N D O N :

Printed by JAMES WAUGH, for RICHARD HETT, in the *Poultry*;
JAMES BUCKLAND, in *Pater-noster Row*; and Mrs. WINBUSH,
at *Charing-Cross*. MDCCLXIX.

[Price One Shilling.]

The Nativity of Christ considered and
improved

IN

TWO SERMONS

MERCHANTS LECTURE



Procurator General's Office

LONDON

JOHN HUGHES & CO.

Printed by J. HUGHES & CO. at the
British Museum, London.



T O T H E
C O N G R E G A T I O N,

Which usually attends my MINISTRY.

My dear christian friends!



H E relation, in which divine providence has united us, requires that I should assist your progress in the way to heaven; all I can; and the consideration, that I must give an account, is an awful argument, to engage me to watch for your souls, and to fulfill the ministry which I have received of the Lord.

iv DEDICATION

For this reason I decline no opportunity of publick service in the pulpit; and am also willing, when it is desired, to put into your hands printed discourses, which you may have for private use.

God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his son, that the promoting the redeemer's kingdom, and the salvation of precious souls, is my governing aim in all my ministrations. And in order to this, the subjects I choose to discourse upon from time to time, are the great doctrines of the gospel, and whatever may lead to the knowledge, love and practice of real godliness in all its branches; enforcing gospel-precepts by gospel-motives. And this I take to be the proper, the distinguishing business and duty of a christian minister.

As I am determined, after the example of *St. Paul*, not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified; so I
care-

DEDICATION.

carefully avoid controverted points, which
gender strifes, and eat out the very heart of
serious religion.

What I have said against observing any par-
ticular day in celebration of our blessed SA-
VIOUR's nativity, is not designed to reproach
or offend our brethren in the established
church; but only a necessary hint, as I ap-
prehended, to vindicate the conduct of Pro-
testant Dissenters in not regarding any such
time.

I have no furious zeal, I bless God, for
any party: a narrow contracted spirit is ut-
terly repugnant to the genius of the gospel,
which inculcates universal benevolence, and
carries the notion of charity and brotherly
love much higher, than any other religion,
that ever appeared in the world. I esteem
and honour good christians of every denomi-
nation: and by whomsoever CHRIST is
preached

DEDICATION.

preached, I therein do rejoice, yea and will rejoice.

I sincerely commend you and yours to the favour of almighty God. May your families be blessed by him, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named. I wish you many years of comfort and usefulness in the present world; and hope to meet you with abundant joy at God's right hand in the next world; when the days of our pilgrimage on earth shall be ended.

I am

Your affectionate friend,

and servant in the gospel of Christ,

Aldermanbury,

January 2, 1748-9.

Obadiah Hughes.



LUKE ii. 10, 11.

And the angel said unto them, fear not : for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people ; for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a SAVIOUR, which is CHRIST THE LORD.

 **T**HE nativity of our blessed SAVIOUR is a frequent subject of discourse at this season of the year [1]: *this day* [2] being solemnized in the *established church*, as a yearly festival appointed in remembrance of it. I am far from thinking it necessary to observe any particular day on this account ; especially since neither the *day*, nor the *month*, when CHRIST was born, can with any certainty be determined : though it seems most probable to have been in the month *Tisri*, which answers to part of our *September* [3].
Surely,

[1] Preached at *Salter's-Hall* tuesday-lecture, *December* 1, and 8, 1747.

[2] Preached at *Westminster*, *December* 25, 1748.

[3] The learned have been perpetually disputing about this matter, and are never likely to settle it. Some fix our SAVIOUR'S birth on the sixth of *January* [*Epiphanius*] :

Surely, if our blessed LORD had judged it either *necessary*, or even *adviseable*, that a particular day should be celebrated in commemoration of his birth, he would in the records of his holy religion have given directions about it, and taken effectual care, that there should have been no room to doubt of the precise and certain time. The practice has not the least countenance from *scripture*; and I wish there were such good effects of it, visible in the lives and conversations of men at this season, as might make it appear *fit* and *proper*.—However, if any keep the day, let them keep it unto the LORD; and I pray GOD bless them! and they, *that regard not the day, to the LORD they do not regard it*:—let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind [1]; and let him ever act, as he apprehends he shall be best able to give up a good account to his LORD and master at the great day.

But though I do not think it proper to observe any particular day, as the anniversary of CHRIST's nativity; yet, since what

[*Epiphanius*]: *Clemens Alexandrinus* some time in the *Spring*: others determine it to have been on some day in *September* [*Beroaldus, Scaliger, Calvisius, Lightfoot, &c.* This last especially, who was perhaps the most considerable man for *Jewish* learning, that our country ever bred, has advanced several things, which make it appear highly probable, that CHRIST was born in the Month *Tisri*, our *September*, and at the *feast of Tabernacles*.] others again seem very confident, that the exact day was the *twenty-fifth of December*. [*Chrysostom, Latina and Occidentalis Ecclesiae*] The great *Spanheim* thinks it was some time either in the *spring* or the *fall* of the year. But after all these differing opinions, the learned *Scaliger* says, [*solius dei est diem definire*] “GOD only can fix the certain day.” I will not pretend to say, how far another writer [*Dr. Drake* in *Chronol.*] is in the right as to what he has delivered upon this subject, *viz.* “that GOD on purpose concealed “the time of CHRIST's birth, as he did the body of *Moses*, foreseeing how it “would have been abused to superstition, had it been exactly known:” it is good advice however of *Scultetus*, “since the scripture is silent, let us also be silent; “and let us adore CHRIST our SAVIOUR born in time, though we are ignorant “of the particular point of time, when he was born.”

[1] Rom. xiv. 5, 6.

is seasonable at *all* times cannot be improper at *any*; I have thought it not amiss to discourse to you at present upon this important subject: and I shall think myself happy, if what I shall now say might help you to meditate upon it, with a due frame and temper of soul: with this view I have chosen the words of the text, as suitable to the design.

It is observable, that St. *Luke* gives a more particular account of our SAVIOUR's birth, than any other of the *evangelists*. This chapter contains a variety of circumstances, attending his first entrance into the world.

The *time*, when this great event happened, is pointed out; *viz.* when by a decree from Cæsar Augustus all the world (i. e. all the Roman empire, which by reason of its vast extent at that time was reckoned a whole world) was taxed; Cyrenius (or Sulpitius Quirinius) being then governor of Syria [1]: but it must be acknowledged, that learned men differ about fixing the precise year, when this taxing was made: the great Dr. *Lightfoot* lays it in the thirty-first year of Augustus. It is plain it was, when the Jews were become subject to the Roman power, and the sceptre was departed from Judah: and I am apt to think, that this circumstance is mentioned, not so much to determine the exact year, as to show us with what exact punctuality Jacob's prophecy was fulfilled in the birth of CHRIST, the *Shiloh* and *Messiah* [2].

We are also informed of the *place*, where this divine child first drew his breath; *viz.* in *Bethlehem*, the city of *David* [3]: so it was prophesied [4], and so it came to pass. *Bethlehem* in the Hebrew signifies *the house of bread*; "a proper place (says a devout expositor) for

B

" him

[1] Ver. 1, 2. [2] Gen. xlix. 10. [3] Ver. 4. [4] Mic. v. 2.

"him to be born in, who is *the bread of life*, the bread *that came down from heaven* [1]:" this was a royal city, the city of *David*; and where else should *the son of David* be born!

But how famous soever the city was, it seems the *mother of Jesus* had very mean accommodations: the whole house of *David* being gathered together, upon account of the public tax or enrolment, in this place, it was very difficult to be provided with lodgings; insomuch that there being *no room in the inn*, she was delivered in a stable, and made use of a *manger* instead of a cradle [2]. — Thus mean, thus low was the birth of the son of God! Thus did the Lord of life and glory humble himself, when he came to *tabernacle on earth*!

But though he was *brought forth* in this mean and obscure manner; yet being a considerable personage, his birth must not be kept a secret: providence therefore took care to have it sufficiently notified: the way, in which this was done, the sacred historian distinctly informs us. It seems, there were some *shepherds in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night* [3]; cold work truly, if at this part of the year! but the learned *Scaliger* tells us, "that shepherds were not wont in winter to watch their flocks by night [4]." And all on a sudden *the angel of the LORD came upon them, and the glory of the LORD shone round about them*; i. e. there was a most marvellous light and splendour; like the *Shechinah* probably, the glorious light which attended the divine appearance, and used to represent the presence of God; and in this light there appeared an angel in a visible form. It is no wonder to hear, that this unusual and magnificent appearance made the shepherds *fore afraid* [5]: these humble

[1] Henry. [2] Ver. 7. [3] Ver. 8. [4] Vid. *Voss. de Natali Jesu Christi*. [5] Ver. 9.

humble swains, whose conversation chiefly lay among their flocks, might well be surprized and thrown into consternation by all this glory. The angel immediately perceiving their fright, endeavours to compose them; *fear not*; "be not surprized at what you see, how new or strange a sight soever; for I have nothing to declare to you, that should in the least awaken your fears, or terrify your minds; I am indeed an angel of God, and am now sent express from heaven, with a message to you; but it is of such a nature, as should dissipate your fears and create amazing joy in your hearts; tis the best news that ever came from heaven: *I bring you good tidings of great joy*." In the original it is, *I evangelize to you great joy* [1]: the gospel is good news from heaven; it contains matter of great joy; our hearts should rejoice at the blessed sound [2].

In the text we may take notice of three things.

1. The messenger; an *angel*: perhaps the angel *Gabriel*, who was before sent to the virgin *Mary*, to acquaint her, that by the appointment of God, she was to be the happy mother of *CHRIST* [3]. It is very idle and impertinent to enquire, in what form or shape the angel appeared; it is sufficient to know, that though it was in a very glorious and extraordinary manner, yet it was in a visible shape, so as to be seen and heard by the shepherds; and they could conclude for certain, that it was an express messenger come directly from heaven.

2. The persons, who were favoured with this heavenly message; *shepherds*. God did not choose out the *great* or the

B 2

learned

[1] *evangelizomai*. [2] The word (gospel) in our language is derived from the Saxon, *godspell* which signifies, either *GOD's word*, or *good saying*.

[3] Luke i. 26.

learned to communicate this news to *at first*: the truths of the gospel usually are best received by plain and simple minds. The chief priests and elders, the scribes and doctors in the temple, were in no disposition to receive this message: had it been *first* notified to them, in all probability they would have treated it with neglect, as an *idle tale*: whereas these plain honest-hearted shepherds attended to the message; diligently enquired into the truth of it; and made a faithful report of what they had heard and seen; they made known abroad the saying, which was told them concerning this child [1].

3. The message itself; it was a piece of good news, that concerned *all people*: the whole race of mankind were interested in it, as laying the foundation of great joy to the *whole world* in general, and not to the *Jewish* nation only: though it did indeed in the first instant principally affect them.

Let us now attend to this glad some news, and hear the angel's message; *unto you is born this day in the city of David, a SAVIOUR, which is CHRIST, the LORD: q. d.* "at this very instant of "time, this day (or this night, which is reckoned with the day to make one particular portion of time, called a day: *the evening and the morning were the first day.*) a SAVIOUR, the promised and "long-expected Saviour, CHRIST the anointed of God, the "*Messiah*, the LORD of *all* is born into the world; he is born in "*the city of David*, as it was foretold; and *unto you is born this* "blessed child:"—unto you *men*, not unto *angels*.—The fallen angels which kept not their first estate, sunk down into an abyss of misery, and their case is hopeless; no Saviour was ever born unto them;

[1] Ver. 17.

them ; no offers of pardon and mercy were ever tendered to them : CHRIST took not on him the nature of angels [1] ; but they are reserved in everlasting chains under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day [2].—unto you Jews :—though you have been a wicked and rebellious people, and have provoked GOD to anger by your many and shameful abominations ; yet a Saviour is sent unto you : not indeed to you *exclusive* of the rest of your fellow-creatures ; but unto you *first* GOD has sent him to bless you [3] : the first tender of gospel-grace was made to the Jews, and from them it was to be sent into the world : CHRIST tells his apostles, *that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all nations*, but they must begin at Jerusalem [4] . . Salvation was to come *from them* unto all the earth !—unto you sinners :—who, as such, stand in need of a Saviour, and must inevitably perish without one. This the common case of all mankind ! we have *all sinned and come short of the glory of GOD* ; but (blessed be his name) unto us a SAVIOUR is born ; an almighty friend has undertaken our recovery from sin and misery ; and he is *able to save to the utmost all that come unto GOD through him* [5] .—Once more ; unto you *shepherds* :—how low and poor soever your circumstances and condition may be, how mean and despicable soever you are in the eyes of the world ; yet such is the regard a merciful GOD has for you, that unto you is born a SAVIOUR ; one, who will not reject you, if you will receive him : poverty is no badge of disgrace in the esteem of CHRIST ; he is the common Saviour both of rich and poor ; and *the poor have the gospel preached unto them* [6] .

The

[1] Heb. ii. 16.

[2] Jude ver. 6.

[3] Acts iii. 26.

[4] Luke xxiv. 47.

[5] Heb. vii. 25.

[6] Mat. xi. 5.

The several parts of the text being thus distinctly illustrated, we may resolve the whole into this *general proposition, viz.*

That the account of CHRIST's birth is matter of *great joy to all people.*

In discoursing upon which proposition I shall attempt the following things.

I. To prove the truth of it.

II. To show, what practical improvement we should make of this important subject.

I. I am to *prove the truth* of the proposition; and to demonstrate, that the account of CHRIST's birth is matter of *great joy to all people.*

Here it will be necessary, distinctly to show, that the news of CHRIST's birth gives sufficient *foundation for joy*; and how this affects *all people.*

§. I. The account of CHRIST's birth is *in itself* matter of *great joy*: it is good tidings, and most welcome news to mortal men.

The following particulars will fully evince this truth.

1. The deplorable circumstances, into which sin had brought mankind, make it evident that the news of a SAVIOUR's being born must afford the strongest reason for abundant joy.

By the iniquity of the fall a most unhappy distance had been occasioned between GOD and man; the breach was so wide, that

that it became almost irreparable; nor indeed could the controversy have ever been determined, and a reconciliation compassed, had not CHRIST undertaken the kind office of *mediator*. The whole human race was involved in the sad consequences of the *first* apostacy: in this our forlorn condition, no eye pitied us, and no arm of flesh could save us; no man upon earth, nor angel in heaven, was equal to the arduous task; the redemption of our souls was too precious for any creature to purchase; then said CHRIST, *lo I come to do thy will, ob GOD* [1]; we must for ever have sunk under the pressure of our guilt, had there not, according to the counsels of divine wisdom, been provided a SAVIOUR, one every way fit for so great a work: and who could this possibly be, but the SON of GOD? He must come from heaven, and clothe himself with mortal flesh, that he might be capable of compassing the glorious design. Oh how welcome the news of this to the children of man! with what raptures of joy must we hear the glad tidings, that an almighty SAVIOUR is born unto us: that the only-begotten SON of GOD has come into our world in order to procure our salvation; all mortal tongues should join in singing, "*Hosanna to the son of David; blessed is he, that cometh in the name of the LORD, hosanna in the highest*" [2]."

2. The character of the person born must furnish matter of great joy, at the news of his birth.

The angel is very particular in describing the glorious child, whose birth he is sent to notify to the shepherds; and every term in his character helps to greaten the joy. A SAVIOUR which is CHRIST the LORD.

He

[1] Psal. xl. 7, 8. compared with Heb. x. 7. [2] Mat. xxi. 9.

He is a SAVIOUR: oh the blessed sound! how grateful to the ears of sinful creatures! to us is born a SAVIOUR; one, who will deliver us from all evil, and will raise us to the enjoyment of all the happiness, which our natures are capable of: for all this is included in the term [*Saviour*], when applied to CHRIST. He is THE SAVIOUR, in a sense infinitely beyond all others; and the salvation, which he has wrought out, is emphatically *the great salvation*. He will procure compleat and eternal salvation for all those, who consent to be saved by him, in his own way and upon his own terms; for to this end was he born; and his very name must express his gracious errand into our world; *thou shalt call his name JESUS, for he shall save his people from their sins* [1]; from the dominion and power of sin *at present*, and from the ruinous consequences of it *hereafter*; by virtue of this SAVIOUR, sin shall not reign in our mortal bodies *now*, nor shall it destroy our immortal souls *at last*; the influences of his *spirit* prevent the *former*; his infinite *merits* will effectually secure us from the *latter*. And besides all this he will procure for us the favour of his offended FATHER; and on his account we shall stand right in the court of heaven, being *accepted in the beloved*: he will raise us to the dignity of *the sons of God*, and we shall be intitled to all their glorious privileges; that is in short, we shall be under the care and conduct of our heavenly father, while we are passing through *this life*, and we shall be perfectly happy in the full enjoyment of him in *the life to come*. All this is secured to us by our SAVIOUR: how should our hearts exult then

at

[1] Mat. i. 21.

at the news, that he has been born into the world with this kind design: *to you is born a SAVIOUR*; oh sweet delightful name!

The angel adds, *which is CHRIST the LORD*. This SAVIOUR of *men* is the CHRIST of GOD; the person appointed by GOD for this purpose, and *anointed* to this glorious office, fitted with all furniture and accomplishments necessary to it; and besides this, he is THE LORD; in himself a sovereign prince, the LORD of the whole universe; *all power is given to him in heaven and earth* [1]. How comfortable is this view of our SAVIOUR! what an agreeable light do we behold him in! how should it exhilarate our spirits, and fill us with unspeakable joy! — The kind friend, who has undertaken our salvation, is none other than the *son* of GOD; he is the *Messiah*, the *Christ*, sent by GOD on this errand, qualified also for this work, both by the *anointing* of GOD, and by his own *authority* and *power*, being LORD of all: He is therefore every way capable of managing with the greatest success an affair of this nature and importance. The salvation of men depends upon the success, which the redeemer shall have; but we need not doubt success, since he who has undertaken it, is *par negotio*, fully equal to the work, as being CHRIST the LORD.

3. The birth of CHRIST will furnish matter of great joy, as it exhibits the strongest evidence of GOD's love to poor sinners.

What an amazing instance of love is this! well might the angels upon the occasion sing, "*good-will to men*." GOD himself could not have displayed his tender regards to mankind in a more convincing manner; GOD so loved *the world*, that he gave his only begotten son to us; and sent him into the world, that we might live through him [2]. So loved *the world*, as that there never

C

was

[1] Mat. xxviii. 18.

[2] John iii. 16. 1 John iv. 9.

was any thing like it! a more illustrious instance of love never was, and never can be given! that the great God should send his own son into the world, for our recovery and salvation; to repair the ruins of the fall, to restore us to the divine favour, and to advance us to a state of much greater happiness, than *that* from which we were fallen; oh *the height and the depth, the length and the breadth* of this unmeasurable love! stand amazed oh my soul, behold and wonder! what matchless love was this! let my thoughts dwell with pleasure on this unparalleled evidence of divine love! this is good tidings indeed! this a sufficient reason for the most rapturous joy!

4. The great encouragement we may from hence take in our addresses to God, is a farther reason, why the news of a SAVIOUR's birth should be considered, as good tidings of great joy.

Nothing can enliven our prayers, nothing can give us more true courage in applying to God, than this expression of his love in sending his son to be our saviour: — we hence conclude, without the least room for doubt, that we go to a God, who is well-disposed towards us, and bears a hearty good-will to the children of men; — to a God, who is ready to give us every good thing; nor is there any mercy too great, or too important to hope for at his hands; for, as the apostle has taught us to argue, *he that spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things* [1]? If God has given us *his son* from heaven, and sent him into the world for our sakes, as our SAVIOUR; we may surely hope, he will give us every lesser blessing, that we need; and therefore we may *come boldly to the throne of grace*; especially since
through

[1] Rom. viii. 32.

through CHRIST, there is a new relation contracted and established betwixt the blessed God, and all good men; for he, that is *the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, is also the God and father of *all true believers*. This consideration CHRIST suggested for the comfort of his disciples, when he was soon to be removed from them; he sent them a most comfortable message by *Mary Magdalene*, and every christian may derive comfort from it still; *go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my father and your father, and to my God and your God* [1]. Is the blessed God then become our *Father*? may we look up to him as sustaining such a character, and standing in this endearing relation? and shall we be afraid or backward to ask his favour, and to beg the mercies which we need? do earthly parents give good gifts to their children; and can we suppose that our heavenly father will deny his children any thing, that is good for them? no surely; he is infinitely more compassionate than the most tender parent upon earth; he is as much more *willing*, as he is more *able*; our blessed LORD on this account directs his disciples to consider God in this relation, when ever they pray to him; the form or model of prayer, which at their request he taught them, thus begins, "*Our father which art in heaven*" &c.

Allow me to borrow a few thoughts from the learned Dr. *Barrow* upon this subject [2]. "There never can be a greater occasion, or juster cause of rejoicing than this, that our Lord is born and come — In this all the grand causes of joy and festivity do conspire.

"Is the birth of a prince ever by honest subjects entertained and celebrated with joy? behold a prince born to all the world.

C 2

[1] John xx. 17.

[2] V. Barr. Works, V. 2. p. 343, 344.

" world. — Is victory glorious and joyful? See the invincible
 " warrior is issued forth into the field, *conquering and to conquer.*
 " The *captain of our salvation* appeareth, triumphing in humility;
 " the great blow is given; all the enemies, amazed, daunted and
 " confounded, break, scatter and flee before him. — Is the pub-
 " lishing peace acceptable? behold eternal peace between heaven
 " and earth, a general peace among men, a peace of conscience
 " between man and himself, is now established and proclaimed: the
 " illustrious ambassadour, the noble hostage, the infallible pledge
 " thereof is arrived; *preaching peace to them that are far off,*
 " *and to them that are near.* — Is recovery of liberty comfort-
 " able unto slaves and captives? behold the redeemer is come, the
 " great ransom is laid down, sufficient to purchase the freedom of
 " whole worlds. — Is the coming of a good friend to be con-
 " gratulated? behold the best friend to all mankind (bringing
 " with him most wholesome advice, most needful succour, most
 " seasonable consolation) is arrived to visit us and dwell with us. —
 " Is it a comfortable thing to be graced with honour? What
 " greater honour could mankind be dignified with, than this of
 " receiving the son of God into it's kind and kindred? what
 " could more advance and adorn us than this high relation? —
 " Is mirth seasonable to the day of marriage? behold heaven and
 " earth this day are coupled, divinity is espoused to humanity,
 " an eternal indissoluble knot of amity, of unity, is tyed between
 " God and man; the great Bridegroom is come forth clad in
 " his nuptial garment of flesh, ready to wed the church, his be-
 " loved spouse. — Is the sun's rising (after a long, dark and
 " cold night) chearful and comfortable? See, *the sun of righte-*
 " *ousness is risen, with healing in his wings;* dispensing all about
 " his

his most pleasant light, and salutary influences. Never did heaven with so clear and serene a countenance smile upon earth as it did this day, when this super-illustrious luminary (*this bright morning star*) did spring up above our horizon." &c. &c.

Upon all these accounts it appears very evident, that the birth of CHRIST gives foundation for great joy. I am now according to my proposed scheme,

§. 2. To show, how these glad tidings of great joy may be said to affect all people; — which shall be to all people, said the angel to the shepherds.

The design of this expression is, to let us know, that the son of God was born into the world, not for the sake of any particular nation, or set of men.

The Jews indeed expected the promised *Messiah*, whenever he came, to have appeared in majesty and state, with all the pomp and grandeur of an earthly prince, and to be *their* deliverer; *theirs* solely and exclusively of all other people; they thought nothing less, than that he should rescue them from the subjection they were then under to the *Roman* power, and restore them to full liberty; nor did they imagine, that any other nation under heaven was to be interested in him, or receive any advantage from him.

But the angel speaks in a very different strain to these honest shepherds; telling them, that the coming of the *Messiah* was of a more extensive nature, and should have an universal influence over all mankind, and would be the cause of great joy to all people in general.

In order to understand the force of this expression, it may be proper to take notice; that at the time of CHRIST's coming into the world, all mankind were rank'd under the two general heads of *Jews* or *Gentiles*; all men belong'd to one or other of these classes; this was the distinction at that time: if therefore it can be made appear, that the birth of CHRIST was of real advantage to both these sorts, then the consequence will be plain to a demonstration, that the account of it was cause of great joy to all people. Nor is this hard to prove; the words of *Simion*, when he had our blessed LORD in his arms, evince and illustrate this truth; hear the good old man, LORD now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, i. e. CHRIST, who brought salvation with him, and was appointed and sent by God on this saving design; which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; we may imagine the old saint hugging this blessed babe in his feeble arms, and clasping it to his raptured breast, when he adds, a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel [1]; plainly intimating, that the birth of this child would be of universal advantage; the whole world would receive benefit; and therefore all mankind, both Jew and Gentile, have reason to receive the account of it, as good tidings of great joy.

1. CHRIST was a light to lighten the gentiles.

This part of the world, being involved in worse than Egyptian darkness, did walk in their own ways [2]; without CHRIST, they were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of promise, having no hope, and living as without God in the world [3]: But now the sun of righteousness is risen, they

[1] Inf. ver. 30. & seq.

[2] Acts xiv. 16.

[3] Eph. ii. 12.

they are enlightened with the glorious light of the gospel; and embracing CHRIST the true light [1] of the world, in his light they shall see eternal light: they were sometimes afar off, but now are made nigh by the blood of CHRIST [2]: it was prophesied of the Messiah, that he should enlighten a dark world; *I will give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth* [3]: a glorious promise this! in part accomplished already; for many mighty nations in the pagan world have been enlightened with gospel-light, and thereby been brought to the knowledge of the true GOD: but we may expect the compleat accomplishment of it, when the fulness of the Gentiles shall come in [4]: such a time will come, when the Jews shall be converted, and the fulness of the Gentiles shall be brought in; and both of them shall be united, as one sheepfold under JESUS the great shepherd: and in order to bring about this blessed design, the apostles were commanded not to confine their preaching to the Jewish nation, but to turn to the gentiles: so Paul and Barnabas tell the Jews at Antioch, in that remarkable passage [5]; *it was necessary, that the word of GOD should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles; for so hath the LORD commanded us, saying: I have set thee to be a light to the Gentiles, that thou shouldst be for salvation unto the ends of the earth: the saving design, which CHRIST came into the world for, is only to be promoted by enlightening the eyes of mankind, and so bringing them to know the things which belong to their peace, and which will make them truly happy. By diffusing* light

[1] John i. 9.

[2] Eph. ii. 13.

[3] Isa. xlix. 6.

[4] Rom. xi. 25.

[5] Acts xiii. 46, 47.

light over a dark world, CHRIST promotes the salvation of men to the most distant regions; he thus scatters blessings far and wide, and *the uttermost parts of the earth* see the *salvation* of the LORD. "CHRIST came (says Mr. Henry) to be the light of the world, not a candle in the *Jewish* candlestick, but the *sun of righteousness* [1]."

2. CHRIST was the glory of *Israel*.

There was indeed no nation under heaven so highly favoured by the great God, as the *Jewish* people, the seed of *Abraham* his friend; they were his peculiar favourites, treated by him in a most indulgent manner, and greatly honoured with divine discoveries, above any nation: *THY PEOPLE Israel*, says *Simeon*: thine, in a sense peculiar to themselves: all the *earth* is the LORD's, but *Israel* his *chosen inheritance*. But notwithstanding this, (and perhaps for this very reason in some measure) they were had in the utmost contempt by the rest of the world; the *Greeks* and *Barbarians* despised them, as a vain conceited people, only fond of themselves; and the *Romans* derided them, as extravagantly superstitious.

However, after the *Messiah* appeared in the world, and the blessed sound of his gospel began to spread among the nations of the earth; then the *Gentiles* soon acknowledged, how great the dignity of the *Jews* was above all other people; as they were *that very nation*, from whence salvation came to all others: thus was CHRIST a *glory* to them, and obtained for them a *great name* in all the earth.

It was, no doubt, a great *glory* and honour to them, that the Saviour of mankind should *spring from* them. To them he was

[1] Vid. expof. ad loc.

considered and improved.

25

was promised; of them he was born; with them he lived and conversed familiarly; amongst them he wrought his miracles; and to them he preached his gospel: salvation thus began at them; and from them the blessed sound and the happy influences of the gospel were diffused over the earth, to nations near and afar off.

Thus it appears evident, that all people (as the angel tells the shepherds in the text) had the highest reason greatly to rejoice at the birth of JESUS CHRIST, the glorious SAVIOUR of mankind: both Jew and Gentile, i. e. the whole world, was exceedingly obliged to him; and should join in joyful acclamations of praise and glory unto him, who loved us, and came to save us.



And the angel said unto them, fear not:
for, behold, I bring you good tidings of
great joy, which shall be to all people;
for unto you is born a son, in the
city of David, which is

CHRIST THE
SAVIOUR OF THE WORLD
THE ANGEL SAID UNTO THEM, FEAR NOT:
FOR, BEHOLD, I BRING YOU GOOD TIDINGS
OF GREAT JOY, WHICH SHALL BE TO ALL
PEOPLE: FOR UNTO YOU IS BORN A SON,
IN THE CITY OF DAVID, WHICH IS

IL TO

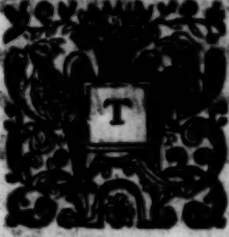
D

S E R-

S E R M O N II.

LUKE II. 10, 11.

*And the angel said unto them, fear not:
for, behold, I bring you good tidings of
great joy, which shall be to all people;
for unto you is born this day, in the
city of David, a SAVIOUR, which is
CHRIST THE LORD.*

 **T**HE Doctrinal part of this subject has been
already considered; and it has been distinctly
shewn; (I) That the birth of JESUS CHRIST,
as a SAVIOUR, is matter of great joy: and
(II) How this affects all people. — I come now,
according to the proposed scheme,

II. To show, what *practical improvement* we should make of this important doctrine, by way of *Application*.

Here I beg your serious attention to several particulars, which will represent our duty; and I pray God give us all grace to practise accordingly.

Let us admire the love of God and Christ, as it is evidently displayed in this instance: and let it excite reciprocal affections in us.

This is a proper subject of *admiration*: the angels desire to look into this *mystery of godliness*, but are lost in wonder and astonishment.

How surprizing the love of the great God! *first*, that he should condescend to accept of any atonement for the sins of the world; that he should consent to the recovery of apostate men, and be ready to receive them into his favour, upon *any terms*: —and *next*, that when none but himself could provide a *Saviour*, and none but *his own beloved son* was equal to the arduous undertaking, he was graciously pleased to send him on the kind errand. A noble display this of God's *good-will to men*! no stronger evidence could be given; in this was manifested, was evidently demonstrated, and publicly made appear, the love of God towards us, that God sent his only-begotten son into the world, that we might live through him [1].

Do

Nor

[1] I John iv. 9.

Nor, 2. Was the love of CHRIST less conspicuous, in his readiness to come into the world; upon a design so friendly to mankind, and so necessary to their salvation and happiness. How amazing, that the Son of GOD should stoop so low, in the service of such sinful creatures; who could not be of any service to him, and were infinitely beneath his regards: that when he was in the form of GOD, and thought it not robbery to be equal with GOD; he should make himself of no reputation! he emptied himself [1], laid aside his former glory, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross [2]. Amazing humiliation this! never was equal condescension, nor does to be compared with this of the Son of GOD.

And as this should fill us with holy admiration: so it should inflame our souls with the warmest affection. Hard and rocky hearts that man be indeed, who can meditate upon this love of GOD and CHRIST, without having his heart broken within him; we must surely feel the fire burn, when we are set on so sublime and glorious a subject. Words can express, nor thought comprehend the extent and degree of GOD's amazing love: with the greatest propriety does St. Paul speak of it, as an *unsearchable* knowledge [3]. My soul is all on fire, and at a loss to express the tender and quick resentment it has thereof; "Lord I will love thee as long as I have a being; my dear redeemer shall be more to me than all the world; and my whole life shall be conducted in a way, that shall best discover my sense of obligation and the strength of my affection." It was a good prayer of

pious

[1] *εἰς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ κενότητα*.

[2] Phil. ii. 6, &c.

[3] Eph. iii. 19.

pious St. Bernard, "I wish, oh Lord, that as the word was made
"flesh, so my heart might be made a heart of flesh, soft and
"penetrable, yielding and flexible, that I may sufficiently resent,
"extol and magnify so rich a favour, vouchsafed to lost man."

2. Let us endeavour by all possible means to secure an interest
in this SAVIOUR.

God forbid! that it should be the unhappy case of any of us,
to have heard of a Saviour's being born into the world, to
save mankind from sin and ruin, and yet we have no right
to him, no interest in him. Oh dreadful condition! may every
one of us make it our daily labour to secure an interest in Jesus
the redeemer! the sacred historian tells us, that as soon as the
angel had communicated this good news to the shepherds, and the
glory was removed from them, they hasted away to Bethlehem,
that they might find CHRIST. Happy souls, who without de-
lay look out by faith for CHRIST, seek after him, and give not
over the search, till they have made sure of him as their own.
Such early, such unwearied pursuits shall meet with desired suc-
cess; if we seek him early, we shall find him. Blessed be God
for this encouragement; it should animate our searches after
CHRIST, and we should go about enquiring after our beloved
SAVIOUR; saw ye him, whom my soul loveth. Nor indeed should
we ever be at rest within ourselves, till we are able to say with
Thomas those appropriating words to CHRIST, my lord and my
god; and till we have reason to conclude, that he has said unto
our souls, I am your salvation [1]. Oh blessed state, to have this
point

[1] Ps. xxxv. 3.

point once well settled! we may then call ourselves happy, though we are destitute of many of the accommodations of this life, and in distressing circumstances. If CHRIST be ours, all is ours: a confluence of all good things without him will leave us miserable; if JESUS is gone, then all is gone: but his presence in any condition of life will make us happy. Oh that we may be able therefore on the surest grounds to claim a right to him, saying with the spouse, in a holy transport of joy concerning CHRIST; "this is my beloved and this is my friend; my beloved is mine and I am his." — The best, and indeed the only, method effectually to secure this interest in the SAVIOUR, is what I would choose to make a distinct head of advice, viz.

3. We must be sure to comply with the design of CHRIST in being born into the world.

It was infinite condescension in the son of God; and no doubt, but he had some great and noble things in view, when he consented to be thus abased. A gracious design it was indeed! namely, to save from ruin an apostate race of sinful creatures, who would otherwise have perished by their own folly, having appeared in open rebellion against their CREATOR. The whole current of sacred Scripture plainly declares this: God sent his only begotten son into the world, says one apostle, that we might live through him [1]: says another, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons [2]. It was for our sakes, and in the service of our souls. Oh the riches of divine grace! and it was distinguishing grace; for verily he took not on him

[1] 1 John iv. 9. [2] Gal. iv. 5.

him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham [1]: The angels, which fell never had a SAVIOUR born, nor salvation offered to them; they are reserved, without the least glimmering of hope, in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day [2]: But unto us men a SAVIOUR is born; JESUS the CHRIST and son of God has come into our world, to repair the ruins of the fall, to recover us from a state of sin and misery, into which the race of men had unhappily fallen; and to restore them to the favour of their offended maker, and to raise them to the dignity and privileges of the children of God. This was the redeemer's design; to bless us, by turning every one of us from our iniquities, as St. Peter says [3]; and so to save our souls.

Let us therefore most heartily comply with this saving design, by repenting of our sins, turning from them unto God, and resolutely forsaking every evil way;—And indeed we have all imaginable reason to do so, and that upon a double account, viz.

A. By way of grateful return to CHRIST for his most amazing grace towards us, in coming into the world, that he might redeem and save us from our sins. To continue therefore in the allowed practice of sin now, is not only disobedience to our great Creator; but a most abominable offence against the mercy and compassion of a kind and generous Saviour: It is a base treatment of the Son of God; no higher ingratitude can there possibly be; nor will any thing be more severely resented and punished by CHRIST at last: the sacred Scriptures have branded this conduct with the greatest infamy; they call it, a crucifying afresh the son of God, and putting him to open shame [4]; a treading under

[1] Heb. ii. 16.

[2] Jude ver. 6.

[3] Acts iii. 16

[4] Heb. vi. 6.

The Nativity of CHRIST

under foot the son of God; and counting the blood of the covenant an unholy thing; and doing despite to the spirit of grace [1]; most heinous and complicated guilt indeed! and can any one be so abandoned, as to treat the SAVIOUR of the world in such a shameful manner, with all this indignity and ingratitude? Can any amongst the children of Adam act a part so vile and monstrous? Lord, is thy servant a dog, that he should be capable of doing this great wickedness [2]? One would conclude such a thing impossible.

B. We should also, in compliance with the design of CHRIST's being born, forsake sin; as it is hereby evidently proclaimed a most horrid evil, and consequently to be avoided with the greatest care by all reasonable creatures.

Sin does now appear exceeding sinful, in this light; as it brought down the son of God from heaven, to expiate the guilt of it. Of what a malignant and heinous nature must sin needs be? and how should this consideration excite within us the warmest indignation against so cursed an evil. We should certainly hate sin with a perfect hatred, counting it our enemy; and indeed it is the worst enemy we can have! for had not the son of God undertaken our recovery and salvation, sin had inevitably ruined the whole human race long ago. Let us then maintain a constant war against sin, and not allow ourselves in any evil practice!

And let me here add, we should cultivate holiness, all we can, both in heart and life: CHRIST came to destroy the works of the devil, and to bring in universal righteousness; and the main design of his gospel, which the apostle with the greatest propriety styles

[1] Heb. x. 28. [2] 2 Kings viii. 13.

the grace of GOD [1], is to teach men to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world [2]. It is worth observing therefore, that generally in sacred scripture, where-ever mention is made of CHRIST's coming in the flesh, there is something added about holiness and righteousness of life; intimating, that this was the grand end of his appearing in our world: I might instance in several passages of scripture, both in the Old and in the New Testament; but I shall mention only one, which indeed is exceeding full and comprehensive: it is in the song of Zacharias; when speaking of the birth of CHRIST, the good old man expresses himself in these remarkable words, *that we being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, might serve GOD, without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our lives* [3].

I add only as a close to this head: that unless the design of CHRIST's being born be thus complied with by us; so as to make us careful to avoid all sin, and to perfect holiness in the fear of GOD, we shall not have any interest in him; it will, as to us, be in vain that he was ever born; nor shall we have lot or portion in that salvation, which he came into the world to purchase for the children of man: we shall be utterly incapable of the blessings of the gospel of grace; for we are expressly told, *that without holiness no man can see the Lord* [4]. The thought of this is shocking: and GOD forbid, it should be the case of any of us!

4. Let us receive CHRIST in a proper manner, and with a suitable disposition of temper and spirit, agreeably to his several characters. Unto you, says the angel, is born A SAVIOUR, which is CHRIST the LORD.

E

A. He

[1] Tit. ii. 11. [2] Ver. 12. [3] Luke i. 74, 75. [4] Heb. xii. 14.

A. He is JESUS the SAVIOUR; let us *love* him, as such. Our most ardent affections are due to him, on this account; and it is the worst degree of sacrilege to withhold this from him. The freeness, the generosity, the undeservedness, and the greatness of CHRIST's love in becoming our SAVIOUR, do all call upon us for our most affectionate love to him; and indeed the remembrance of his rich grace, herein display'd, should raise our souls into rapturous extasies of love and gratitude to our dear redeemer.

B. He is CHRIST, the *anointed*; the appointed and commissioned mediator betwixt God and man; let us *trust* and *confide* in him accordingly. He is every way qualified for the important work, which is devolved on him; he is able to manage the concerns of our souls to the greatest advantage; we may safely venture our all in the hands of so able a friend. The blessed God, besides the appointing CHRIST to this office, and qualifying him for it, has moreover declared his acceptance of him in it: when he *died* in the service of our souls, and *made himself a sacrifice* and offering for sin, God plainly signified himself fully pleased with him, by raising him from the dead, and advancing him to his *right hand* in the heavenly world: and there he *ever lives* to carry on the work of our salvation, in *making intercession* for us; and hereupon is *able to save to the utmost all, who come unto God through him* [1].

C. Again, We must *adore* him as the Son of God, the Messiah, sent to save the world. If *all the angels of God* are commanded to *worship him* [2]; surely *we*, the sinful offspring of Adam, should with the lowest reverence bow before him, and acknowledge our obligations. We are told, that the *wise men*, who were conducted

[1] Heb. vii. 25.

[2] Heb. i. 6.

ducted by an extraordinary star from the *East* to *Betlehem*, the birth-place of *CHRIST*, as soon as they were blessed with the sight of the new-born saviour, *fell down and worshiped him* [1]; this they did, when he was in a very *low and mean estate*; they found him without the least appearance of grandeur and majesty; a helpless infant just born; his palace a stable in a common inn; his cradle a manger; and his only attendants were his own poor mother and her husband, excepting the beasts, who were under the same roof. Thus mean, and low and poor did the Son of God become for our sakes. But the *wise men* were instructed by a more glorious light, than the star which conducted them to *Betlehem*, to see through all this dark veil, and in this *despised neglected babe* they discerned *the glory*, as of the *only-begotten of the father*; and hereupon presented *first* themselves, and *then* their gifts to him; they adored him and paid him homage as a King. Now if these *wise men* paid this honour to *CHRIST*, when he had nothing about him, that looked like majesty; but all appeared extremely mean and low; and when they knew so little of him; sure we ought with the highest reverence to adore him, as the Son of God, our most blessed redeemer; for we are by *the gospel* fully informed of the dignity of his person; and of the gracious design, which brought him down to our world; as also, that he is now ascended into the highest heavens, set down at the right hand of the great God his father, appearing there in regal state and dignity, in all the pomp and glory of the Son of God: since we are taught and profess to believe all this; I say, surely he demands our highest and most reverent adorations. Once more,

E 2

D. We

[1] Matt. ii. 11.

D: We must *obey* him, and *submit to him*, as THE LORD. The government of the world is vested in him, as the LORD; and he rules in all the earth, and is to be acknowledged as *such*; in consequence of this, his laws and commands are to be most religiously observed; and the disposals and appointments of his providence must be readily acquiesced in and submitted to. *He is our LORD*, and therefore must we thus *worship him* [1]; for, by the bye, obedience and submission are the most considerable branches of that worship and homage, which we must pay to CHRIST the LORD; and *without these* all other acts of worship are but mere pretence and good for nothing; altogether *vain*, not accepted by CHRIST, nor any way profitable to *man*.

g. Let the news of a SAVIOUR's birth fill us with *great joy*.

The news of a SAVIOUR's birth is *good tidings of great joy*; so said the angel to the shepherds, who was sent express from heaven to bring the news; the best news indeed that ever came to our world! The consideration of it should perpetually create fresh joy in our hearts. The blessing to mankind is inconceivably great, and we shall discover a stupid senselessness of our happiness, if our hearts are void of joy when we contemplate it. Our blessed Lord tells the *Jews*, your father ABRAHAM *rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad* [2]. He saw it at a distance by faith, and the assured prospect filled him with exquisite joy; he could at most have but an obscure apprehension of the blessing of it; this however excited joy and gladness in his holy soul: with what transports of joy then should we be affected?

We,

[1] Psal. xlv. 11.

[2] John viii. 56.

We, on whom this sun of righteousness is actually risen! we, who have heard the blessed sound, that a SAVIOUR is born; and that through him we may expect a full deliverance from all the miseries, to which sin had exposed us; and a glorious advancement to all the happiness, of which our natures are capable.

There was vast joy and rejoicing expressed at the birth of CHRIST; the angels, who brought the news from heaven, sung for joy; *Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good-will towards men*; the wise men rejoiced with exceeding great joy; and so glad were the shepherds, that they returned praising and glorifying God; they were tuned to songs of praise, faintly attempting, it may be, an imitation of the choir of angels, to whose anthems of joy they had been witnesses; *the shepherds heard them sing*. We have the song of Elizabeth, Zacharias, and Simeon on this happy occasion; and the blessed mother of our LORD herself could not forbear discovering her joyful resentments. — Methinks we should kindle at this holy fire. Every reflection upon this glorious event should excite new pleasure in our grateful minds; and we should take all possible methods, to express the high sense we have of obligation for so wondrous a mercy, as the birth and incarnation of the son of God.

6. Let us be duely sensible of the great honour, which the Son of God, by being born, has put upon the human nature.

CHRIST was born of a woman, was made flesh; he took upon him a human body, and so has greatly exalted our nature. This consideration should inspire us with a sense of the dignity of our natures, and we should be disposed to conduct ourselves becomingly.

ingly. If the great God put such a value upon his human creatures, as for their sakes to send his only-begotten Son into the world, to take *their* nature into the nearest union with the *divine*; we may surely hence infer, that *man* is no contemptible, no inconsiderable being: we should therefore put a due value upon ourselves; and take great care of that, which God did not think beneath his greatest regards.

We ought, I say, to *value ourselves*; not indeed so as to be proud, vain or high-minded — but to be sensible of the honour conferred upon us, and to behave in a manner agreeable thereto. We should be ashamed, and think it beneath us to do any thing unworthy the high regard, which God has shown to us; or what would tend to debase our natures, which the Son of God has so greatly dignified. CHRIST is become *bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh*, and has vouchsafed to make us *his brethren*; we should be careful then not to do any base action, by which a disgrace might be brought upon that glorious family, to which we have now the honour of being related. We may now consider ourselves, as one expresses it, “ of *the blood royal of heaven*, in this “ respect over-topping all the creation of God [1].” Being therefore so highly dignified, our minds should be proportionably great and noble; we should scorn to stoop to any mean action, or to be carried away with the love of any inferior enjoyments, and should be animated to do actions, worthy of our honourable character, and alliance.

It was a great vanity in *Alexander*, and other men of superior dignity in former ages, to affect to be esteemed more than mere men, nay to be accounted and worshipped as Gods. *Varro* was of opinion,

[1] Dr. Barrow, V. 2. 342.

opinion, that all gallant and heroic men should believe themselves, though falsely, to issue from the Gods; — that upon this supposition, they might attempt great things with more courage, and prosecute them with more ardency; and though the motive was but imaginary, yet it might produce glorious effects [1].

The christian religion gives real foundation for such an opinion; and every true believer does actually become *the child of God*. CHRIST has taken the human nature into union with the divine, and has made our peace with God; so that every child of *Adam*, who receives CHRIST as his SAVIOUR, and consents to be saved by him in his own way and upon his own terms, shall have power, i. e. a right and title, as well as the honour and privilege, to become a child of God [2]. And in consequence hereof, every such person should behave in a way correspondent to such a grand character; and be aiming at the most noble enterprizes in piety and virtue.

7. The condescension of the Son of God in being born into this world to be the SAVIOUR of mankind, should put us upon a careful imitation of him, in several excellent graces or virtues, of which, on this account, he is a most illustrious pattern.

One end of CHRIST's coming into the world was, to tabernacle among men [*the word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us*] that so he might fulfil all righteousness, living those very rules, which he prescribed for the conduct of others, and thereby exemplifying the graces and virtues of a good life. Herein,

as

[1] V. Aug. de civ. Dei. c. 4.

[2] John i. 12.

as the apostle speaks, *he has left us an example, that we should follow his steps*; let us therefore imitate him. His being born does more especially call upon us, to imitate him in the following particulars; viz.

A. In *humility*.—What infinite condescension was it for the Son of God; who was *lord and heir of all things*, to take upon him *human nature*, to appear in the livery and form of a *servant*; to put on weak and frail flesh, and with it all sinless infirmities; to be *born of a woman*; to be wrapt in swaddling cloaths; to lie in a manger; and to go through all the weakness attending the several stages of human life from infancy to manhood! How did CHRIST in all this humble himself! and surely, as the apostle argues, *the same mind should be in us, which was also in Christ Jesus* [1]: we should learn from this glorious example, according to his own direction, *to be meek and lowly in heart* [2]; we should most cheerfully stoop to the meanest employments, when valuable purposes may thereby be answered; and not insist upon rigorous niceties, or troublesome punctilios in our converse with fellow creatures. Was the Son of God humble, and shall poor mortal worms be proud? did he empty himself, and shall vain men swell; and be puffed up with a conceited opinion of themselves?

B. In *a holy contempt of the present world*.—What a slur has the Son of God, by the circumstances of his birth, put upon all worldly grandeur? He could have chosen some noble city to have been born in; but he made choice of obscure *Betlehem*: he might have been brought forth in a palace, with royal attendants about him; but he was born in a stable, and laid in a manger:

[1] Phil. ii. 5.

[2] Mat. xi. 29.

ger: he might have commanded all things to have contributed to the making his circumstances on earth pompous and magnificent: but behold the very reverse! he despises all the glories of the world; he was born of poor parents; lived in a low way, and probably both fared and worked hard during the time of his *obscurity* and *retirement*; nay, when he appeared in *publick* life, and assumed a publick character, as *the Son of God* and *the Saviour of men*, he had neither house nor home, that he could call his own, not so much as a place *where to lay his blessed head*, and was throughout life in low and strait circumstances. What a disgrace has he hereby cast on the honours and riches of this world, those glittering bawbles and gilded toys, which foolish mortals are apt so much to admire! Shall the pomp of this world, the glories, or wealth of it dazzle our eyes, engage our affections and captivate our hearts, when we profess ourselves the followers of that Jesus, who with a brave generosity despised them all, and would not do them so much honour as to partake of any of them?

C. *In a cheerful and ready obedience and submission to his father.* — How willingly did he fall in with the father's proposal, that he should undertake the recovery of mankind! *lo, I come to do thy will, oh God.* "Here I am, send me on the blessed errand; I am ready at thy command to go down to earth, to take a body of humiliation, to tabernacle among men, and to submit to every thing that is necessary, in order to compass the redemption of mankind, and to recover them to *their* allegiance and to *thy* favour." Our blessed LORD foresaw every thing, that he was to meet with in this world, the wants and the meanness, the reproaches and contempts, the pains and sufferings, which

he was to undergo; but as it was a *cup*, which his *father* gave him, he was ready to *drink it*.

D. In a *bearty compassion and affectionate love to all mankind*. — There is not a parallel instance of compassion and mercy, of good will and love, to be produced in the whole world. And if CHRIST *so loved us*, we ought also to love one another [1]: the objects of his love should command ours. Shall we refuse to be tender-hearted and kindly affectioned towards those, for whom the eternal Son of God has discovered such amazing compassion and love? The *general* love of God to the world, should induce an *universal love* amongst all mankind: his *peculiar* love to his church and saints should produce in us a *peculiar affection* to such. We ought to banish all remainders of ill-will, envy or malice, and with much affection be united to one another; to *love all men*, especially *such as are of the household of faith*, and heirs with us of that salvation and eternal life, which CHRIST was born into the world to procure for us. It was observed by the *Heathens* concerning the *primitive Christians*, that they were eminently illustrious in the exercise of *this grace*: it was a common saying among themselves concerning the *first disciples*; *behold, how they love one another*. Oh would to God this blessed temper might more prevail in our day! CHRIST came to unite us all in the bonds of love; and therefore, tho' possibly we may see reason to differ from one another in our judgments about particular matters; yet nothing hinders (I am sure nothing should hinder) our being strongly united in mutual affection and love.

8. Let

[1] 1 John iv. 11.

8. Let us take the *comfort*, which this doctrine of the birth of the Son of God gives solid foundation for.

Every doctrine of the gospel is big with *comfort*, as well as *counsel*; and we deprive ourselves greatly of the advantage we might get, if we do not consider it in both views; namely as administering comfort, and suggesting counsel. We have considered already what *instructions* for regulating our hearts and lives may be gathered from the *incarnation* and *birth* of CHRIST; let us now see what *comfort* it affords to good christians. And truly it abounds with *much*; and that *suited* also to the various circumstances of human life. The true believer may derive rich consolation and support from hence, under whatever distresses he may meet with in passing through the world. — When we are almost born down by pressing *troubles* and *sorrows*, how comfortable to remember, that CHRIST himself came into the world and dwelt in it, and thereby is fully acquainted with the afflictions of mortal life; he experimentally knows, what evils and trials abide us here; for he was himself *a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief* [1]; and we may encourage ourselves to hope, that he will commiserate our distress and afford us proper relief. All true christians in a day of trouble may suppose their blessed SAVIOUR speaking to them in this soft and tender language, to sooth their sorrows and lighten their burdens. “Sink not under your troubles, ye faithful disciples of mine; suffer not your spirits to faint, nor your souls to die within you; look up to me your never-failing friend in heaven; and remember, I was once my-
 “ self

F 2

[1] *Iai. liii. 3.*

" self a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; from the
 " manger to the sepulchre my life was one continued scene of
 " labour and sorrow; I know experimentally, by having taken
 " the human nature upon me, what infirmities and troubles man-
 " kind are subject to; and assure yourselves, *I am touched with the*
 " *feeling of your infirmities*; I most tenderly compassionate your
 " distress, and you may depend upon my help; *cast your burden*
 " *upon me, I will sustain it*; I will enable you to bear it, as long
 " as it must continue, and in due time I will work complete sal-
 " vation for you." With this assurance the believing soul cannot
 sink: his spirits revive; it is the voice of my beloved; LORD if
 thou wilt be with me, I shall *rejoice in tribulation*; I will wel-
 come any trouble I can meet with, and patiently bear whatever
 burden thou mayest see fit to lay upon me.

In like manner; if the good christian be in *low circumstances*,
 he may with confidence trust in his SAVIOUR, and derive comfort
 from the consideration of his having once been born into our
 world. The apostle has taught us to argue, *if God spared not*
his own Son, but freely gave him up for us all, how shall he not
with him as freely give us all other things [1]. Depend upon
 it, GOD WILL PROVIDE, and *we shall be fed*: we shall not be
 left quite naked and destitute; but shall have all necessary supplies
here; and how strait soever we may be kept *now*, we shall be fully
 rich and happy *hereafter*. CHRIST himself was in a low and
 poor condition, whilst he sojourned upon earth; we must not be
 uneasy, if we are in similar circumstances. HE is now crowned
 with glory; and there are crowns of glory and life ready for every
 sincere *christian*, when he arrives where JESUS is. HE, blessed
 SAVIOUR,

[1] Rom. viii. 32.

SAVIOUR, came down from heaven, to raise us to it; and it is his declared will and pleasure, that *where he is, there his servants shall be also*. How should this consideration support us under every trouble in life! and what amazing comfort does it afford to good men, when they come to *close life*! If we have secured an interest in CHRIST, *our SAVIOUR*, we may at death transmit our souls with pleasure into another world, trusting them in the hands of so kind a *friend*: nor need we in the least doubt their being safely lodged in the realms of immortal joy, when we have in faith said unto him; " *LORD JESUS receive our Spirits.*"



The Nativity of CHRIST.*

S Hepherds rejoice, lift up your eyes,
 And send your fears away;
 News from the region of the skies;
 SALVATION'S born to day.

II. JESUS

* N. B. This HYMN, or *Sacred Song*, is borrow'd from my honoured father and friend, the late learned and pious ISAAC WATTS, D. D. His *memory* will be precious to all good men of the *present age*, who had the happiness of being acquainted with him in any degree of intimacy. The hardened *sinner*, the scoffing *infidel*, and the determined *bigot*, cannot relish men of serious piety, strict religion, or generous principles: and to say the truth, their favour and good opinion is no more to be *valued*, than it is to be *expected*. — *My soul come not thou into their secret!* — And the *Doctor's* learned, serious, and polite *writings*, of various kinds, will convey the grateful favour and idea of his real worth to *generations yet unborn*. By *these* HE being *dead*, yet *speakes*. Nor do I make the least doubt; but *succeeding ages* will be greatly delighted, and edified by his most *entertaining* and *instructive* labours; as long as any copies of them remain in the World. V. *Hæc Lyrica*. p. 15.

II.

JESUS the GOD, whom angels fear,
Comes down to dwell with you :
To day HE makes his entrance here ;
But not as monarchs do.

III.

No gold, nor purple, swadling bands,
Nor royal shining things ;
A manger for his cradle stands,
And holds the KING OF KINGS.

IV.

Go shepherds, where the infant lies,
And see his humble throne ;
With tears of joy in all your eyes,
Go shepherds, kiss the SON.

V.

Thus *Gabriel* sang ! and strait around
The heavenly armies throng ;
They tune their harps to lofty sound,
And thus conclude the song.

“ Glory

VI.

" Glory to God, who reigns above,
 " Let peace surround the earth;
 " Mortals shall know their MAKER'S love;
 " At their REDEEMER'S birth.

VII.

LORD, and shall Angels have their songs,
 And Men no tunes to raise?
 O may we lose these useless tongues,
 When they forget to praise.

VIII.

Glory to God, who reigns above,
 That pitied US forlorn:
 We join to sing our MAKER'S love,
 For there's a SAVIOUR born.

V.

Thus Gabriel sang: " Hail!
 The heavenly armies throng;
 They came their Saviour to bring,
 And thus conclude the song.

" Glory

